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OCT 11 1996

Federal Communications Commission  
Office of Secretary

Reed Hunt  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
FAX: (202) 418-2801

Dear Chairman Hunt,

I know that every day when you go to work the quality of children's television programming is one of the toughest challenges you face.

I'd like to tell you about a newspaper column I've created, "Unglued from the Tube", that will try to further your goals of making the best of television better for children. It will be nationally syndicated later this summer. Already it's been endorsed by the director of children's programming for PBS, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, The Children's Television Resource and Education Center and Linda Ellerbee, creator of Nick News.

Every week I'll select one program for parents and young children (ages 3 to 9) to watch together. I'll offer a synopsis of the show and then suggest activities and discussion questions to enhance the program's educational value. Parents may scan the suggestions to select the questions and activities that best fit their children's ages and interests. I won't suggest a program without previewing it.

I want to keep children's minds working while they're watching television. Get them talking about values, emotions and ideas. Parents who read my column can use television (in moderation) to strengthen the time they spend with their children instead of allowing it to create numbing distance within their families.

I'd appreciate your help. I'm sending you a couple of samples of my weekly column that TV Data's Entertainment Features Syndicate will begin in August offering to newspapers across the country. If you like the pieces and my goals for the project, I'd like to use a comment from you as we introduce the column to newspaper editors.

I thank you in advance for your help. I know we both want children using television wisely.

Sincerely,

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List A B C D E

### About the Author

Diana Dawson worked for 15 years as a newspaper reporter who specialized in children's welfare issues. During that time she won extensive national recognition for her work. She was a finalist for the Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, for the Ernie Pyle Award, and twice for the national Livingston Awards for Young Journalists. She won the national Benjamin Fine Award for Education Reporting and the American Bar Association's Silver Gavel Award. She twice won the Children's Express National Award. She was part of a team of reporters who were finalists in 1993 for the Pulitzer Prize.

Diana now lives outside of Austin, Texas, where she's making the most of that short, sweet time while she's her preschool son's favorite playmate. When she's not in the sandbox, she works as a writing coach and writes "Unglued from the Tube."

**Unglued from the Tube**  
**Diana Dawson**

The story of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" endures as a rite of passage for our holiday season. This week that wide-eyed creature returns to our living rooms, charming us as he does every December with his bashful grin and persistently blinking nose.

This is the triumphant tale of a young reindeer, different from his peers, who must overcome a number of obstacles to lead Santa's sleigh. Burl Ives, with a voice as rich and warm as hot chocolate, narrates the story told by a cast of animated characters.

Long after Santa's sleigh has left the North Pole, Rudolph helps you explore with your children such issues as discrimination, sportsmanship, determination and the value of being unique.

**ACTIVITIES:**

- \*Hold your own tryout for Santa's reindeer team by having your children broad jump, navigate through an imaginary rooftop obstacle course and practice their landings.
- \*Make sugar cookies of eight reindeer, Santa Claus and his sleigh.
- \*Draw a picture of Rudolph and color several small circles. Which one makes him a red-nosed reindeer?
- \*Read the story of Rudolph before the program so your children understand the characters and the plot.
- \*Read about real reindeer in the encyclopedia.
- \*Make a reindeer out of twigs glued together and a twist of red yarn for the nose.
- \*Go outside with either a sled or wagon (depending on your climate) and let children take turns being Rudolph leading Santa's sleigh.
- \*Have your children collect all of their abandoned "misfit toys". If the toys are in good condition, encourage the children to donate them to a charity where they may get another lease on life with other less fortunate children.

**DISCUSSION:**

- \*How did Rudolph feel when the other reindeer wouldn't let him play? Is there anything that makes you feel like that?
- \*Is there anyone in your class at school whom the other children exclude? Why? What could you do on your own to make things better for that person?
- \*What obstacles did Rudolph overcome to lead Santa's team?
- \*He sure kept trying even though things were tough, didn't he? What's the toughest thing you've ever done?
- \*The abominable snowman was only a bad guy when his tooth hurt. Do you think sometimes when people are not very nice something else might be bothering them?
- \*Rudolph was special because he wasn't exactly like everyone else. What's the best thing about you that makes you different from your friends?

**Unglued from the Tube**  
**Diana Dawson**

You get to expose the children this week to exquisite music and strong messages of teamwork and leadership. They watch cartoon characters they'd choose if you weren't in the room. That's the beauty of Sergei Prokofiev's classic 1936 musical "Peter and the Wolf" in its new animated and live-action special.

This is the simple story of brave, young Peter who is determined to outwit a fierce wolf to save his animal friends who inhabit an Alpine meadow. Three-time Academy Award winner Chuck Jones has animated the timeless musical score with characters as memorable as his Bugs Bunny, Road Runner and Daffy Duck.

The animated story is surrounded by a live-action tale in which a daughter (Kirstie Alley) takes her son (Ross Malinger) for the first time to visit his grandfather (Lloyd Bridges) in Switzerland. The grandfather, stunned by the child's schedule of organized activities, wonders where the time remains for simple, imaginative play. After seeing this movie, you'll want to regain some of that in your family.

**ACTIVITIES**

\*During the movie, help your children notice how Prokofiev used the personality of music to illustrate his characters. Peter is played by lively string theme, Grandfather is a bassoon, the bird a flute, the duck a reedy oboe, the cat a clarinet, the menacing wolf a trio of french horns and the hunters are timpani drums.

\*Help your children learn problem solving by recreating their own version of "Peter and the Wolf". You play the wolf and let them figure out how to protect the duck and the bird from you. Depending on the number of children in your family, each child may be a character or the duck and the bird may be played by stuffed animals. Your family's "Peter" may protect his friends by tossing a blanket over them to hide them, dressing them in disguises less palatable to a wolf or creating barriers with chairs or toys to separate you from them.

**DISCUSSION**

\*Peter's mother calls the meadow outside her childhood home the most wonderful place in the world. What's your most wonderful place? Why?

\*Peter's grandfather warned him that the meadow was a dangerous place, yet the boy returned to it to save his friends. How else could he have helped his friends, without putting himself in danger?

\*Sometimes it takes teamwork to solve a problem and sometimes it takes one person standing up to be leader. Where in this movie did you see the characters use teamwork? When did Peter take charge?

## **Unglued from the Tube**

### **Diana Dawson**

The challenges and the drama of our historic underground railroad become understandable to children during a "Reading Rainbow" presentation of "The Drinking Gourd" (Monday, Jan. 8 on PBS).

The story by F.N. Monjo begins when young Tommy, sent home from church, wanders into his family's New England barn in the decade before the Civil War. While playing in the hay, he discovers a family of escaping slaves whom his father has hidden. That night Tommy encounters a world different from his own in which laws do not allow justice for all people.

The slaves' son, Little Jeff, teaches Tommy that by following the constellation of the drinking gourd, his family can reach freedom.

#### **ACTIVITIES:**

- \* Have your children draw a picture of the the "drinking gourd", which they may have known as the Big Dipper. Take them outside and help them find it in the night sky.
- \* Demonstrate the difficulties of the underground railroad by having your children imagine how they would have to travel from your house to the nearest grocery store without anyone seeing them. Have them plan the times when they would travel, the path they would take and the modes of transportation they would use.
- \* Make puppets of Tommy and of Little Jeff from photos of children clipped from magazines and glued to the end of popsicle sticks. Encourage your children to take this story a step further by having the puppets explore the similarities and differences in their lives. What's Tommy's day like? How about Jeff's? How does their education compare? What about the time that they spend with their parents? Their experiences in town? What they want most in their lives?

#### **DISCUSSION:**

- \* Deacon Fuller and Tommy broke the laws of that time by helping Big Jeff and his family escape slavery through the underground railroad. Is it ever OK to break rules? When? What should you do if you think a rule should be broken?
- \* Slavery allowed white people to benefit at the expense of black people. Can you think of any situations today in which one person benefits at the cost of another? What should be done about that?
- \* Tommy's father told him he had tried for years to get the laws allowing slavery changed. Is there anything that you think is unjust that you would want to try to change? Laws? At your school? Among your friends? How could you do that?

**Unglued from the Tube**  
**Diana Dawson**

Take everyone in your family along with Lemuel Gulliver this week as he travels through the lands of little people, giants, impractical intellectuals and rational horses.

This extraordinary production of the 1726 novel "Gulliver's Travels" airs on NBC Sunday and Monday, February 4 and 5. Lemuel Gulliver and his wife are played by Ted Danson and Mary Steenburgen. Among other stars, the movie also features Omar Sharif and Peter O'Toole.

When the classic is taken at face value by small children it's a magical tale of one man's encounters with people the size of both mice and monsters, intricate castles on the scale of dollhouses and wondrous talking animals. Older children and parents may find that the satire written 270 years ago by Jonathan Swift continues to raise questions about military might, law, government institutions and man's pomposity.

**ACTIVITIES:**

- \*Help your children find the Lilliputians in their own world. With a magnifying glass or a bug box with a magnified lid, take a look at a ladybug, an ant, a snail. Discuss how we must appear to them and how sensitive we must be to creatures smaller than us.
- \*Create your own land of Lilliput. Build village businesses, homes and castles from shoeboxes decorated with matchbox furniture, thimble dishes and aluminum foil mirrors. Populate the land with small dolls and tiny stuffed animals. Here, at last, is a home for the prizes from kids' boxed fast-food meals.
- \*Encourage your children to take turns playing giants and little people, the horse and Gulliver. Help them see how the world is a different place, depending on their vantage point.

**DISCUSSION:**

- \*Throughout the movie Gulliver is tormented as he tries to persuade his family and doctors that his adventures were real, not imaginary. Have you ever had difficulty persuading someone you were telling the truth? What happened? How did that make you feel?
- \*If your pet were able to talk to you for a day, what questions would he have about the way we live and how we treat him? How would you explain to him the rationale behind downhill skiing, ball pits and bubble gum?
- \*When Gulliver looked at his country from different perspectives, he saw that, perhaps, it wasn't as civilized as he'd assumed. What kinds of things do you think are accepted in our society but may not be right?
- \*In the end, Gulliver tells us that he has seen the things that we can only dream about. If you could travel as he did, what sort of lands would you want to explore?